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GEOGRAPHY IN THE LIFE OF THE PUPIL

JAMES FRANKLIN CHAMBERLAIN
State Normal School, Los Angeles, Cal.

That our schools do not prepare those who attend them for the opportunities, the responsibilities, the problems of adult life is a statement frequently heard. If this charge be true, then our schools are failing to perform their essential function, for the great aim of education is to prepare for life in the highest sense. Its purpose is so to surround each child by the best influences and conditions, so to direct its physical, mental, and moral growth, that it shall, as a present and future member of society, live the highest life of which it is capable.

No one will question the statement that pupils should study those phases of human knowledge and human activity which will, in later years, enable them to be of the greatest service to themselves and to humanity. In fact, it may be said that the public school has no right to teach anything else. That these subjects should be so presented as to enter into the life interests of the learners is evident. Neither of these conditions is fully realized in practice, and hence the schools are not doing their full duty in training pupils for their life work.

Geography, as one of the fundamental subjects in the elementary school, should receive, as it has been receiving during recent years, the most careful consideration. Both subject-matter and methods of presentation are being examined in order to secure more valuable results. Until quite recently a knowledge of geography was not regarded as an essential part of one's education. Indeed, it seems that it is not generally so regarded today, for our high-school and college graduates know much more of Latin, French, and German than of geography. For the former, the average citizen has comparatively little use, while a knowledge of the latter is constantly demanded in conversation, reading, travel, and business.

The study of geography can and should make our pupils closer observers, clearer thinkers, better reasoners. It should furnish them with information which will be helpful in almost any occupation. It should make them broad and sympathetic in their views. It should remove superstition. It should make traveling, reading, and conversation more pleasurable and more profitable.

In spite of this, and in spite of the fact that geography treats of those things in which both children and adults are deeply interested, and with which they are vitally concerned, the subject is said to be poorly taught. It is said that as a rule it is dry and uninteresting to pupils. It is not long since Dr. Hall characterized it as the "sick man of the curriculum." That there is *some* force in these criticisms every teacher realizes. I wish to point out a few fundamental weaknesses in our work, and to suggest a few improvements.

The failure of geography to enter fully into the lives of the pupils in the elementary school is not a matter of failing to provide for instruction in the subject, but rather to unwise selection and presentation of subject-matter. Although geography has made a remarkable advance during the last two decades it is still too largely a memory subject. Mere exercise of the memory is not necessarily interesting or educative. Unless geography is training our pupils to put together the links in the chain of cause and consequence it is being poorly taught. More important than this is the fact that it is not developing the habit of reasoning without which our pupils will, as adults, be drifted by the currents of popular opinion, now this way, and now that.

The great problem in geography is how to make the subject enter into the conscious experience of the child, for only as it is to him a living reality, as it interests him, appeals to him, and influences his life in ways which are to him apparent, will he enter consciously and purposefully into its study. The subject must do more than offer information through the medium of the printed page; it should encourage the pupil to *experience* geography, and to contribute these experiences. Such opportunity as geography offers for the exercise of the constructive faculty should be used to the fullest extent. This can be carried out in the making of maps, charts, sketches, graphs, and models of various kinds. Where these conditions are not realized the results must always be meager, superficial, unsatisfactory.

The textbook still holds, and must always hold, an important place in the study of geography. The weaknesses of the book are therefore likely to be reflected in the work of pupil and teacher. Our geographies are too incomplete. The material is too fragmentary, too statistical. This is a necessary condition where the plan of treating all or a large part of the world in one book is followed. If each book dealt with the work of a single grade the topics taken up could be more fully and more interestingly presented. This would also make possible a larger number of maps and illustrations. In order to make good this deficiency in the text, supplementary readers should be very freely used. These bring out the human side of geography which always appeals to children. It is a mistake to use these books simply as readers. The topics should be studied and fully discussed by the pupils, and maps employed whenever they would be of service.

Under present conditions the questions in the text constitute an important factor in the work of the pupil. His preparation for the recitation is in large measure based upon these questions, and therefore very much depends upon their character. As a matter of fact the majority of the questions ignore the causal notion. Their study is dry and deadening to the pupil. In our very best texts about one-half of the questions tend to create thought.

Questions pertaining to position, dimensions, area, population are legitimate, and many such should be asked, but they should not dominate the work. The function of questioning is to develop thought, not simply to secure answers. We can increase the interest and the value of the work by supplying questions of the right sort.

The following, which are simply suggestive, indicate how this might be applied to the British Isles:

Using your map, find the latitude of the British Isles. Compare this with the latitude of your state, and with that of Labrador. Using the scale, find the length and the average width of Great Britain. Compare with the dimensions of your state. What is the nature of the coast line? Is such a coast line an advantage or a disadvantage? Make a list of the sea-ports. Make a list of those on the Atlantic coast of the United States. Has the English Channel helped or hindered the development of the British Isles? Give reason for your answer. What part of the British Isles is best watered? Explain. If the mountains extended east and west how would they influence rainfall? Examine an isothermal chart of the British Isles and compare the temperatures with those in New England. Account for the difference. Is there snow in London during the winter? Do people sleigh-ride? Do they skate? Compare with winter conditions in Boston.

What part of England is best adapted to agriculture? Comparing the population with the area, do you think that England's agriculural products supply her demand? If not, where might she purchase wheat, flour, cotton, sugar, fruits, etc.

Locate the coal and iron-producing sections. Locate the manufacturing areas. How are the two related? What is the meaning of the expression, "Carrying coals to Newcastle?" What advantages has Great Britain for shipping her manufactured products? What articles have you seen that were made in the British Isles? Why do people come to America from the British Isles? Why do people go from the United States to that country?

These questions are by no means exhaustive. Similar lists pertaining to other areas can be worked up and placed upon the board to be used by the pupils during the periods devoted to the study of geography.

Special investigation, as well as the experience of the teacher, has shown that the geographical interests of children center in peoples, products, and industries. Hence work involving these topics should be made the basis of introductory geography, and should receive attention throughout the grades.

Our texts give very scanty attention to the industrial and social phases of geography as constituting the basis of the subject. One of the best devotes 107 pages to home geography and of this number the first 79 pages treat of rivers, plains, mountains, the ocean, the air, etc. The remaining 28 pages, or about 25 per cent. of the whole, deal with the human side. Another recent text devotes 45 pages to home geography, 17 of which, or about 40 per cent., treat of the industrial and the social. In other texts introductory geography is almost entirely physical and astronomical.

The child has a more active interest in a snow-white cotton field, in the picking and the ginning of the crop, in its transportation to the mills, and its transformation into wearing apparel, than he has in the conditions of soil, temperature, and moisture, which make the crop possible. Not only this, he sees a closer connection between the industrial and social conditions and himself, than he does between the physical and his individual life.

The story of the necessities of life runs back and forth on bands of steel or over ocean wave, connecting the most distant lands and peoples with the community, with the pupil himself. This is home geography in the largest sense, for the home cannot be understood unless its relation to remote areas is seen. The people of a community and of the world are held together by the chains of mutual industrial, and social interdependence slowly forged through centuries of development in the habits and demands of daily life.

This study of the industrial and social does not ignore the facts of surface, climate, and location. These are of necessity taken up and given more meaning than they would otherwise have.

Among the lessons taught by this phase of geography is the great truth that physical labor is absolutely necessary and honorable. If the pupil sits beside a cheery coal fire while the snow is drifting out of doors, it is because deep beneath the earth's surface men with hands and faces blackened by contact with coal, with bodies weary from labor, toil day after day although constantly exposed to the most terrible dangers. This general truth of the necessity for co-operation and the dignity of labor is presented in different forms as each industry is studied.

While geography deals with the realities of life—human beings, streams, forests, mountains, mines—these are for the most part studied through the use of symbols. Here we have another reason for the difficulty experienced in placing geography among the life-interests of the child. The great value of the excursion is now generally recognized, although it is still much more largely a matter of theory than of practice. Nothing else can give such life and value to geography. With the great inspiring picture spread out before us; the wonderful works of nature, and the marvelous works of man, we ask the pupil to step in doors, and *read about these things.*

That practical difficulties confront us when we attempt to do field work is well known, yet, if all teachers, school authorities, and parents realized fully the importance of this method of study, these obstacles would, in large measure, be removed. The taking of an occasional half day or entire day for excursions should not be regarded as an interference with the regular work of the school. The time is not far distant when out-of-door work will occupy a prominent place in elementary instruction. The excursion should by no means be limited to the observation and study of geographic forms and processes, but should include mills, factories, quarries, museums, and many other centers of human activity. The trips need not be and should not be expensive. If carefully planned and skilfully handled the danger attending them is not worth considering.

Pictures constitute a very valuable aid in the teaching of geography. Here again practice falls short of theory. Merely exhibiting the pictures is not enough, although there is value in this. The teacher should ask questions concerning them so as to encourage close observation.

The modern stereoscopic views are an inspiration to pupils. While using them one can easily imagine that he is observing the actual objects which they represent. The stereopticon should find a much more general use in the elementary school. By means of the slides we may take our pupils on in-door excursions to all parts of the world.

Much material in the form of raw and finished products can be brought into the schoolroom. In studying other states and countries, pupils should be encouraged to bring to the school articles which came from those regions. The list of materials easily obtained is a long one.

Through the efforts of pupils and teacher a school museum of some considerable value, can be worked up. The materials, in connection with pictures and descriptions written by the children, could be so arranged as to present a graphic history of some of the most important industries. When desired they could be so placed as to show their geographical distribution.

Travel is a most potent factor in vitalizing the work in geography. The knowledge and the inspiration obtained by every member of this association who has traveled across the continent to attend this convention can be used to great advantage for years to come. Pupils are always deeply interested in what the teacher has actually seen.

In many schools there are pupils who have enjoyed the benefits of some travel. This contact with geography at first hand should be drawn upon to the fullest extent. As early in the year as possible the teacher should learn just what regions have been seen by pupils. This information can be tabulated and the topics assigned pupils at the proper times. In all cases where trips are being described the routes followed should be carefully traced upon a map before the class.

The exchange of letters by schools in different parts of the country while by no means new, should be much more generally practiced. If one letter a month were written by each grade throughout the year, pupils would be in possession of a very valuable picture of changing landscape, planting, and harvesting of crops, weather conditions, migration of birds, blossoming of wild flowers. In addition there would be descriptions of the surface, natural resources, industries, and the daily lives of the people. If a different section were selected by each grade in the school, and the practice kept up from year to year, it would add immensely to the pupils' knowledge of geography. Pictures accompanying such letters would be a very valuable feature. Several pupils should have a hand in the writing of each geography-letter, thus multiplying the benefit received.

To summarize: Geography while intimately connected with daily life, is not as vital a part of school life as it should be or can be made. Our texts, while steadily improving, are still too meager and statistical in character. A striking weakness is shown by the map questions which do not serve sufficiently to develop thought. The books should be more limited in scope, thus making it possible to treat given areas more interestingly and fully. The map questions should be supplemented by others tending to create more interest and greater mental activity.

Introductory geography should be based upon the industrial and social phases of the subject, as investigation has shown that the geographical interests of children are strong along this line. Such study connects geography directly and vitally with the actual daily life of each pupil, not only as applied to the home, but as applied to the world as well. More use should be made of pictures, stereoscopic views, and slides, as well as of such materials, raw and manufactured, as can be supplied by pupils and teacher. Every school should start a museum which will increase in size and usefulness with each succeeding year.

Such knowledge of areas beyond the immediate vicinity as has been acquired by teacher or pupils through actual observation should be used to the fullest extent. The exchange of letters by schools in different parts of the country can be made a source of the greatest interest and profit.

In these ways geography can be made to enter more fully into the school life of the pupil, and to enlist his conscious and purposeful participation in its study. It will then be fulfilling its deeper function, the training for the larger experiences which follow those of school days.